
**HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD
STAFF REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION**

Landmark/District: **Mount Pleasant Historic District** (x) Agenda
Address: **1620 Lamont Street, NW** () Consent

Meeting Date: **November 17, 2011** (x) Alteration
Case Number: **12-037**

Staff Reviewer: **Tim Dennée**

The applicant, Trout Design Studio, agent and architects for owner Kalorama Holdings LLC,¹ requests the Board's recommendation of approval for a permit to construction of a lattice screen on one end of the front porch and the construction of a six-foot-tall fence/wall in the front yard.

Two options are proposed for the fence/wall. One would be entirely of brick, the other of board-on-board panels between brick piers. Both options would extend the fence/wall beyond the front stoop to the front of the yard, with two new brick piers to support the construction. The wood fence option would retain the stepped cheek wall of the stair on the south side, while the brick option would replace it and its coping with the taller wall.

The stated purpose of the alterations is to screen the subject property from views—and to a lesser extent, smells—of the adjacent trash-storage area of the apartment building next door. That building faces Mount Pleasant Street, so its dumpsters stand here, at its rear.

It seems a reasonable purpose, to an extent. The Board should be sympathetic to the unusual circumstances and, weighing the strict preservation interest against the adaptability one, should consider the installation of screening that is reversible and does not alter the historic porch or steps. On the other hand, the Board should not recommend approval of such an extent of fence or wall, particularly of such a height and solid construction, especially if it alters the original steps, contrary to the Board's design guidelines and only to screen the view from all points of the subject property.

The *District of Columbia Historic Preservation Guidelines* for porches and steps state that: "The porches and steps of Washington's historic residential buildings are two of their most important character-defining features.... Removing existing details and ornamentation from porches and steps, without replacing them, is not appropriate because brackets, columns, railings, moldings and other details and ornamentation significantly contribute to their character." They do,

¹ The most recent deed, recorded September 30, 2011, identifies the owner instead as Bay Ridge Partners LLC.

however, contemplate adding screens to open front porches “if the screen is designed and installed in such a way that the open appearance of the porch is retained.”

The *Guidelines* observe that walls in front yards are almost always retaining walls, as freestanding fences should be of open construction and no more than 42 inches tall. They recommend metal “picket” type fences as usually suitable to the open character of the front yards of historic Washington and to the way such yards and public space have traditionally been treated. The solidity of the proposed fence/wall seems unnecessary when compared with the relative openness of the lattice on the porch, where occupants or visitors are more likely to stand or sit.

Again, the Board should acknowledge the unusual circumstances without recommending approval of an alteration that is contrary to its guidelines and contrary to the character of the Mount Pleasant Historic District.

The staff recommends that the Board not recommend approval of the permit application as submitted, but that the Board support a revision that would allow the lattice screen to be added to the porch, plus a single panel of lattice or planks, maximum six feet tall, to be installed along the stairs only, without projecting further toward the street, or disturbing the existing masonry, or requiring a new or heightened pier.